

Arabic (pp. 101, 205, 'Akbar' instead of Akhbar) and Kaj instead of Kai (p. 227). This might also have helped Mellor to use more academic expressions and to avoid the use of colloquial language and journalistic style. To this end, it would be a good idea to rework the book if it reaches a second edition.

Ultimately, Mellor concludes, 'rather than offering a coherent thesis, the previous chapters provided pointers to future scholarship of Arab media' (p. 191). Furthermore, 'these themes, which have been explored here but not fully synthesized, ought to be prioritized in Arab and Western media scholarship' (p. 192).

Overall, despite its obvious limitations, the book captures the complexity and multifaceted aspects of scholarship on Arab media mainly along an Anglo-American axis and in the Arab world.

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***The Internet in the Arab World: Egypt and Beyond,* Rasha A. Abdulla, (2007)**

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Hussein Amin's introduction to the book promises that '*The Internet in the Arab World* discusses how Arabs can all experience one world [...] without borders or boundaries blocking the flow of information'. Such grand statements are both strengths and weaknesses of this work. By Abdulla's own admission her work endeavours to examine the use of the Internet as a tool for bringing about more democracy, higher levels of development as well as better relations and understanding between the West and the Arab world (p. xviii). And yet such a valuable analysis and social approach of the modern era's most dynamic and important media is drowned out by Douglas A. Boyd's assertion that the 'publication especially helps redress the lack of theory-based Arab communication scholarship' (p. xiii).

Chapter 1, 'Media Technologies in Egypt and the Arab World', asks whether the Arab world came to use media technologies 'to become more socially fulfilled, become better informed and more entertained' (p. 1). Such important questions are never fully addressed at the micro level. Instead Abdulla chooses to focus on the plethora of the available statistics. In Chapter 2, 'Telecommunications and Information Technologies in Egypt and the Arab World', the author provides copious lists of the growth of mainline telephones and cellular phones per thousand people throughout the Arab world, and selected world countries in 1990, 2000 and 2003. While the rates of growth of both modes of telephone are discussed there is little reference to its impact on Internet use within the Arab world, especially the relationship between the number of telephones per thousand people and Internet use.

Chapter 3 outlines a brief history of the Internet, while Chapter 4 focuses on 'The Internet in the Arab World'. Here Abdulla juxtaposes the issue of Internet penetration in North America (p. 34) and Europe (p. 35) with that of the Arab world, highlighting a report by the Arabic Economic Union Council which specifies factors such as the lack of human and economic IT resources, illiteracy and computer literacy, the lack of solid infrastructure and the cost of Internet connectivity as key factors for the digital divide in the Arab world (p. 35). This key theme is only partially addressed four pages later in the subsequent subchapters. Two studies conducted on Internet use in Saudi Arabia highlight its use by young people, particularly males (75 per cent), who prefer to access the medium from home (80 per cent) (p. 40). The breakdown of Internet use is especially relevant as both Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the two countries with the highest rate of IT diffusion in the Arab world, and yet each Internet account within Egypt is shared by eight people in contrast to about three people in the Arab world (p. 36). Such anomalies are not fully examined. Instead the narrative focuses on elite Internet cities such as Dubai Internet City and Egypt's very own business-orientated Smart Village (p. 42). By the author's own admission the available data on the demographic spread of Internet users in Egypt is limited.

An exception to the elitist use and research into the Internet has been the Technology Access Community Centres (TACCS), which were launched in 1999 in two cities 80 kilometres north of Cairo. The aim was to provide Internet and other communication technologies to residents of rural and remote communities. The project also developed some 1,400 web pages in Arabic, and a database of the local medical practitioners that is now maintained on a Ministry of Health and Population website (p. 50). A key aim and objective of the project was to introduce the concept of e-commerce. This was helped by the inauguration in 2004 of a government initiative which allowed all 26 governments, and 35 national ministries to be accessed through a central portal which allowed online requesting of birth certificates, the payment of phone and electricity bills as well as other government-controlled services (p. 54). Nevertheless, the integration of the TACCS and e-government as an indication of the importance of the Internet within the wider Egyptian community is not fully examined in this work. An analysis and breakdown based on the geographical, socio-economic, job-related and gender

breakdown of Internet use would have benefited not only Egypt but also the wider Arab community. Also, further questions should have been addressed such as the degree to which the Internet can foment social and economic development within developing nations, juxtaposed against the level of socio-economic and organizational development to fully benefit from the use of the medium.

Chapter 6, 'Islam and the Internet', covers popular Islamic websites and Islamic portals. Abdullah analyses the importance of these sites as they provide tangible benefits to Arab and Muslim communities, many of whom speak Arabic, and who can access Internet websites from abroad (p. 73). This further supports her initial comments on the need for more understanding between western culture and the Arab world post-9/11 (p. 2). What falls outside the remit of her work is the increased politicization of radical Islam, in this case the use of the Internet by radical Muslim figures, and most recently the reaction to, and the setting up of an online community between Muslim and Danish youths concerning the Danish cartoons crisis (p. 70). We must ask whether such political Islam is particular of all Arab countries this volume claims to represent; for example, secular Tunisia and more mainstream Muslim states. Yet by devoting a chapter to the Internet and political Islam she negates to tackle other aspects of Arab culture, such as its architecture, its cuisine and its arts.

Possibly the greatest weakness of this work is the oblique examination of the political nature of media and communication in the Arab world. For instance Nasser's use of radio broadcasting to speak to the Arab world, which transformed him into 'a political and cultural leader' (p. 7), is briefly discussed, and portrayed in a positive light. Also, the fragmented analysis of the evolution of the political media does not examine the recent media battles between pan-Arab satellite television networks such as Al-Jazeera and the political aspirations of the Qatari royal family who finance the operation. For this reason, use of the Internet in the Arab sphere as a political tool is not approached.

The author, however, focuses on the state censorship of the Internet. Chapter 7, 'To E- (Freely) or not to E-: Arab Governments and the Online Free Flow of Information', states that Saudi Arabian authorities were proud to censor 200,000 websites in the first eighteen months after the service was opened to the public (p. 78). Egypt, in contrast, appears to be a veritable haven of Internet use with only a few situations concerning sexual, religious and a female free-speech advocate were investigated or detained by the authorities (p. 85). The Egyptian authorities may not censor the Internet *per se*, but they threaten journalists who cross the authorities with the loss of employment rights (Fandy 2007: 23), which may threaten the independence of electronic versions of Egyptian newspapers posted on the Internet.

The final four chapters of this volume report on a research done by the author herself. Chapter 8 is the grandiose 'Is the Internet Good for You? Patterns of Internet Use Worldwide'. Here, she analyses studies, which have employed the Uses and Gratifications methodology, especially in the field of Internet research such as Chao (2001) who found perceived barriers to Taiwanese undergraduate students to be traffic congestion as well as the lack of English skills in reading and writing (p. 99).

The author's own research draws heavily on the orientation and direction of the studies outlined above conducted through the Uses and Gratifications theory within an academic framework, rather than the general use of the Internet in the Arab world. Rasha Abdulla's study examines a series of questions such as gender use, exposure to the Internet, the use of the Internet as determined by the Internet connection and how the Internet use affects social activities. While her methodology is sound and her research is exacting, her findings are in many ways consistent with previous studies on Internet use by students (p. 143). Her greatest insights were the socio-cultural factors that influenced the gender use of the Internet. Males, she argued, are expected to take the initiative in meeting members of the opposite sex in Arab society. According to her study males were therefore more accustomed to starting a conversation with strangers than females.

This book does cover many issues including the lack of theory-based Arab communications studies and the importance and use of the Internet in the Arab world. But through the author's own admission her research has weaknesses. First, the research group itself came from the American University in Cairo (AUC) where Internet use is estimated at about 90 per cent. In comparison, the much larger Cairo University has an Internet use of between 3 and 5 per cent (p. 111). Second, the author admits that the students are educated in English and are unlikely to suffer from the same obstacles as their lower socio-economic fellow citizens. For this reason, the study itself is largely elitist and from the theoretical standpoint shares more similarities with those of Uses and Gratifications Internet studies such as Chao (2001) than with Internet use within Egypt or the Arab world as a whole.

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